

TEN YEARS AFTER —
THE REVOLUTIONARY LEFT IN SCOTLAND

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The revolutionary left celebrates its tenth birthday this year. Of course revolutionary politics go back slightly longer than a decade — as far back as the formation of the Communist Party, or to the nineteenth-century Chartists, perhaps even to the seventeenth-century Levellers — but it was in 1968 that the organisation and politics of today's far left emerged in a recognisable form.

The influences on the left in that first year were international. The student riots and general strike in France, the Tet offensive in Vietnam and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia were the events which shaped a new generation of socialists, and that tradition remains to this day. Any undue concern for home-grown life in Scotland has always seemed drab and parochial in comparison. Certainly many on the left have firmly resisted the label of "Scottish" and there is still no such animal as the "Scottish left", only a series of groups which are, to some extent or other, the functioning branches of organisations based mainly south of the border.

The largest component of this "revolutionary left in Scotland" is the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) which has around 500 members, with offices and half a dozen full-time workers in Glasgow. The International Marxist Group (IMG) has about 80 members, and its full-time worker can be found in offices sited across the landing from those of the SWP in Queen Street, Glasgow, a fact of unceasing confusion for the postman and lift attendant.

These are the two largest organisations of the left, but there are a host of smaller or less active groupings, each of which has fewer than fifty members in Scotland. There is the Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) whose members have the exhausting task of selling their quota of the party's daily news-

paper *The Newslane*, a task made even more arduous by the paper's concentration, often to the length of four or five pages, on the details of the assassination of Trotsky. Supporters of the newspaper *Workers Action* who were formerly organised as the International Communist League (ICL) are restricted to the east coast of Scotland, as are the handful of members of the Revolutionary Communist Group (RCG).

All of these organisations claim to be in some form or other Trotskyist, and it is often difficult to distinguish exact differences between them. At least one of the organisations concerned, the IMG, has argued that the differences are purely "tactical" and that enough agreement exists for serious discussions to be held on unification, but this view is not shared by the others.

Apart from the Trotskyist left, there are a few members of the Workers Party of Scotland, a Maoist organisation led by Spanish Civil War veteran Tom Murray. After a well-publicised trial in 1972, the party's chairman and treasurer were sentenced to over 20 years imprisonment for armed robbery allegedly to raise funds for the party. The other non-Trotskyist organisation is the Socialist Party of Great Britain, one of the original pre-First World War sects, whose members can be seen at the foot of the Mound in Edinburgh, or in Royal Exchange Square in Glasgow any weekend explaining to an assembled crowd the merits of the coming socialist millenium.

Lastly, there are supporters of the *Militant* newspaper who number between 90 and 100. All of them are members of the Labour Party, but mainly of its youth section, the Labour Party Young Socialists, which the *Militant* group controls both in Scotland and in Britain as a whole.

Altogether the far left groups have a membership of between 700 and 800. There are another 100 in the *Militant* groupings, but their commitment to the Labour Party usually excludes them from the designation "revolutionary left".

Could this 800 strong contingent not be larger, ten years on from the heady days of 1968? Certainly those involved in politics in 1974 at the time of the fall of the Tory government had every expectation that they would celebrate the tenth anniversary of May 1968 or the Tet offensive with considerably larger forces. The universally shared assumption of revolutionaries after Wilson's election victory was that the working-class militancy seen under the Heath regime would continue, leading

to inevitable confrontation with the Labour government. The first months of the new Government only encouraged this view.

The victory of the miners produced an impetus to wage struggles which was especially strong in Scotland. One group of workers after another — organised purely on a Scottish basis — came out on strike. Prominent among them were lorry drivers and dustmen. But it was the strike of teachers which provided the greatest hopes for the left. From October to Christmas 1974 around 15,000 teachers were involved in unofficial actions across the Central belt of Scotland. In the absence of official union machinery, action committees were set up and at least in Lothian, Fife and the Borders young left-wing teachers were thrust into leading positions. Demands such as accountable and elected strike committees, regular strike bulletins and mass demonstrations were lifted from left-wing text books and put into practice in a real trade union struggle. Eventually of course the union leadership re-established control, but the experience tended to confirm the revolutionaries' belief that any social contract would be a fragile one and eventually doomed, and that rising unemployment would be inevitably answered by resistance and factory occupations. There seemed no immediate limits to the trade union militancy of the working population.

There was another factor which encouraged the optimism of the revolutionary left as they surveyed their prospects: the growing problems for their main rival in the trade union movement, the Communist Party (CP). The CP has around 6,000 members in Scotland, one fifth of its all British total. Some of its trade union leaders like Mick McGahey of the National Union of Miners, Jim Airlie and Sammy Barr from Clydeside ship-building and Irene Swan from Edinburgh are among the party's best known and respected leaders. In Scotland the party still retains localised electoral support in Clydebank and in Fife and in the 1977 District Elections managed to return two councillors. Their base inside the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) seems as secure as ever, and the role of General Council members who are in the party, like Bill Niven, Hugh D'Arcy, and of course the STUC's General Secretary Jimmy Milne, is a long and successful one.

Yet the picture for the CP is far from happy. Its membership is falling, with its youth organisation, the Young Communist League, down to a couple of hundred members reflecting the

rising age of party members. The last years have seen a steady haemorrhage of leading party trade unionists, such as Jimmy Reid of Upper Clyde Shipbuilders fame and Davy Bolton, a former vice-chairman of the Scottish miners. These are not temporary changes, for the very social basis of past CP support is being undermined. The Vale of Leven and parts of West Fife contained areas known as "Little Moscows" where entire communities gave their support to the party's activities and its electoral attempts. But post-war change, especially in the late 1950s and 1960s destroyed these "closed" collectives, the population was rehoused, and the old workforce dispersed. The consequences for the CP are eloquently demonstrated by the fall in support in West Fife, once the seat of Willie Gallagher, Communist MP.

PERCENTAGE OF VOTES CAST FOR COMMUNIST CANDIDATES
IN WEST FIFE IN GENERAL ELECTIONS 1945-1974

1945	42.1	1964	7.4
1950	21.6	1966	3.6
1951	10.5	1970	1.7
1955	12.6	F) 1974	4.4
1959	8.4	O) 1974	2.4

Such a clear and sustained drop in votes is not just an electoral phenomenon, but expresses a genuine loss of community identification with the CP in this previously mining area.

To compound its problems the party had internal worries. In Glasgow in 1977 opponents of the leadership captured a majority of the delegates to the annual conference. Their leader John Foster, a labour historian from Strathclyde University, argued for opposition to the "reformism" and "revisionism" of the policy document produced by the leadership, *The British Road to Socialism*.

These weaknesses of the CP, its "vulnerable left flank" as the far left saw it, were not unique to Scotland, but they seemed to give added confidence to those hoping to replace the CP as the "natural home" for militant workers on the factory floor. Faced with such promising opportunities, there were in essence three distinct projects mapped out by revolutionaries in Scotland, all of which, it must be remembered, assumed a developing crisis of government and the economy.

The first position, that of the SWP, argued that it would be

possible for revolutionaries to by-pass traditional Labour reformism in this period. To that end "Rank and File" groups were organised in the unions in opposition to the "Broad Left" caucuses traditionally supported by the CP and the Labour left. By far the most successful of these "Rank and File" groupings was in teaching where, capitalising on the leading role of its members in the 1974 strike, "Rank and File Teachers" emerged as the main left-wing opposition to the John Pollock leadership of the Educational Institute of Scotland, the largest teachers' union.

This went hand in hand with the "Right to Work Campaign", but the route marches of unemployed and occupation of dole offices, so much a feature of the work of the SWP down south, never really happened in Scotland. The tactic was obviously modelled on the National Unemployed Workers Movement which claimed 100,000 members at its height in 1933 and one of the leaders of Clydeside unemployed between the wars, Harry McShane, was a frequent speaker at "Right to Work" rallies.

Opposed to this strategy was the IMG who saw it as "syndicalist". They prophesied that the coming battles would provoke divisions inside the leadership of the Labour movement nationally. This, it was argued, would mean the emergence of "left currents" from the unions and the Labour Party lead by opportunist, but demagogic, left social democrats. The "Thesis on Britain" passed by the IMG Conference in 1976 spells this out clearly in the light of the supposedly growing opposition to the Government:

Under those conditions, where every objective development creates the need for a generalised political response and leadership of the working class, but at the same time the overwhelming majority of even the militant workers, give their political allegiance to the Labour Party, such a leadership and political perspective cannot be created in the immediate future — the coming 12-18 months — outside of the Labour Party, if it is to be credible and acceptable to larger sections of the working class.¹

This was not to say that the IMG put any great trust in the Labour left. Their argument was that any opposition to the Wilson government would force the Labour left, regardless of their timidity, into action if only to protect their own political base. The parliamentary voting against the cuts in 1976 and the

unveiling of Tony Benn's "Alternative Strategy" of generalised import controls, and direction of investment into industry, only encouraged them in this view.

The third scenario for the coming confrontation was more radical in its conclusions. The coming confrontation would not primarily be reflected inside Labourism and its organisations, but in the outright rejection of them. A dramatic growth of nationalist and pro-independence current would be the inevitable corollary, and the essential task of Scottish socialists would therefore be to "straddle" both socialism and this "new" Scottish nationalism, in rejecting Westminster Labourist dominance. The 1,000 people who joined the Scottish Labour Party at its formation in January 1976 essentially shared this perspective, although the majority were far from being revolutionaries.

It is now obvious just how wrong all three projections were. There was no paralysing social conflict. Instead, limited and isolated struggles like Grunwick and the firemen's strike ended in defeat, leaving a passive acceptance of unemployment (at record post-war levels in Scotland) and falling living standards, an acceptance incredible to a left poised for action. Despite their differences in approach, all had expected the opposite to happen, and the price they paid was two years of falling membership, declining paper sales and considerable political confusion.

There is no space to examine the particular twists of the IMG in this period in Scotland. They saw the decision by Jim Sillars, MP, to leave the Labour Party and form the Scottish Labour Party as the first example of left-wing social democratic resistance to the Government and consequently decided to join en masse. Only nine months after joining, in November 1976, the entire left wing of the SLP was expelled at the party's first conference in Stirling, and a short-lived organisation — the Scottish Socialist League — was set up, comprising in bulk the former members of the IMG, with a number of other expellees from the Sillars' SLP. It formally "fused" with the IMG at a conference in the Spring of 1977. Set beside the expectations of the IMG at the onset of its "orientation" to the SLP a year earlier, this tactic, like those of all the rest of the revolutionary left, must be judged something of a failure, for it did not lead to large numerical gains or to any dramatic increase in the IMG's implantation inside the labour movement.

This is not to suggest that these have been years of total darkness for the revolutionaries. Each year a small but well-organised opposition to the STUC General Council has been mounted, often led by delegates from Trades Councils like Stirling and latterly Edinburgh, where the CP recently suffered a real bloody nose. In April 1978 Des Loughney, an SWP member and engineering worker from the Parsons Peebles plant in Edinburgh, succeeded in beating the CP's candidate, Brian Fallon, to become Trades Council Secretary, a full-time job made vacant by the elevation of the previous incumbent to a post with the STUC. The revolutionary "capture" of Scotland's second largest Trades Council was an important blow against the CP-Labour left in the East of Scotland, made all the more impressive by the rare degree of revolutionary unity between the IMG, SWP, RCG and WRP whose combined vote made it possible.

There are of course other, longer established footholds for the left. The Glasgow SWP's shop stewards in important plants like Chrysler, Yarrows and the District Council's Electrical Workshop are an impressive example of this. No other organisation (or significantly, any other SWP branch) can claim a similar strength. But these footholds are precisely that; no more than a sprinkling of members in a very limited part of the Scottish Labour movement, and entire sections of the Scottish workforce, such as the miners, remain alien territory.

Even more disappointing for the far left has been its failure to capitalise on the problems of the CP. Despite the fact that the Broad Left — a caucus of CP and Labour Lefts — has not met for over two years in the West of Scotland, the "Rank and File" has been unable to make any impact outside the white collar unions like the EIS and NALGO, the local government workers' union, and the project of replacing the old network of militant shop stewards across industry with a new "revolutionary" one, is still as distant as ever.

It would be tempting to ascribe the impasse of the far left to some error of judgment, as many on the left still do. But behind the mistaken prognosis of what would happen under the Wilson government, was a fundamental confusion, hesitation and ambiguity over some of the most decisive questions in politics, albeit what the left would call "bourgeois politics" — in particular a failure to understand the tenacity of reformism and Labourism

and a myopic prejudice towards the dynamics of the "national question" north of the border.

To take the Labour Party first; nowhere did the party appear more vulnerable to a political challenge from the left than in Scotland. Dundee, Lanarkshire and Glasgow local parties were notorious for their inefficient corruption, with Mrs Catherine Cantley, a Gorbals Labour Councillor, forced to resign in April 1977, after allegations of favouritism in house allocation, epitomising a generation of local government complacency by Labour politicians, especially in the inner cities where their branches were in decay. According to a report prepared for Labour's National Executive Committee in 1975, the average Labour constituency party in Scotland has about 350 members although affiliation fees to the party are based on the assumption that each constituency party has at least 1,000 members.

Yet the Labour Party clearly retains considerable and surprising political reserves. Many members of left-wing groups see it at first hand through their membership of white collar unions like EIS (and to a lesser extent NALGO and the civil servants' union, the CPSA) where Labour Party members like EIS Secretary John Pollock have steered formerly "non-political" professional staff associations into the STUC and the broad labour movement. Instead of "labourism" being a dying and atrophied ideology as the left had projected, it proved itself capable of extending and reproducing itself among newly radicalising sections of the working population.

Just as impressive at another level was the continued intellectual vitality of the party. The publication of *The Red Paper on Scotland* in 1975 was a landmark. For the book was an attempt by socialists to analyse the changes seen in Scotland in recent years.² Edited by Gordon Brown, now prospective parliamentary Labour candidate for Edinburgh South and a member of the Scottish Executive of the party, the bulk of its 29 contributors were firmly inside the CP or left Labour camp, and despite the absence of a single article either by, or about, the half of Scotland's population who are female, its tone was radical and original. Nowhere could the revolutionary left point to a similar work of their own.

Needless to say, there were real and important limits to this left reformism. *The Red Paper* remained a literary exercise and any notions that the "leftism" of its themes could be translated

into the campaign vigour of the *Tribune* groups of the early 1950s or of the CERES current inside the Socialist Party in France today, were still-born. Labour left-wing contributors like Gordon Brown and Robin Cook MP have been politically impotent in face of what must be the most right-wing government since the war. The dynamism of the Labour Party in Scotland, including of course its recent electoral successes against the SNP, have all been achieved under the firm direction of the right wing of the party. It is interesting to note in passing one demonstration of this right-wing dominance, in the choice of parliamentary candidates. With the success of Donald Dewar as Labour candidate in Garscadden and of George Robertson in Hamilton and the nomination to a supposedly safe seat of Dick Douglas, ex-MP for East Stirling, all of the key figures on the Labour right in Scotland are back on the Parliamentary trail. If the last years have been disappointing for the revolutionaries, they have been a tragedy for the Labour left.

But the hidden strengths of (right-wing) Labourism are not the only problems of "strategy" with which the revolutionaries have been struggling. Just as important has been the emergence of a nationalist movement and of demands for greater self-government which, quite simply, have baffled revolutionaries trained to react to the most direct and unmediated questions of class politics. The phenomenon of SNP bourgeois radicalism is outwith any past experience, and all too often the response of groups on the left has been to echo the confusion and conservatism of the official leaders of the labour movement.

Among all the major parties the subject has produced contortions and manoeuvres which are still being played out today: the Tories went from the pro-devolution "Declaration of Perth" ten years ago to today's rigid opposition, while Labour went in exactly the opposite direction. Its vehement opposition to any form of Assembly, although first challenged through the STUC in the late 1960s, was only finally smashed in the late summer of 1975 by a weighty combination of the Scottish trade unions and the London Cabinet of Harold Wilson at a specially held conference in Glasgow.

So the revolutionary left were not alone in their confusions and hesitations over the so called "national question", but on occasions they committed the ultimate in stupidities when faced with a novel political form — they just ignored it. Typical of

this was the election campaign of Peter Porteous of the SWP in the 1978 Garscadden by-election where the entire issue of devolution, the Assembly and self determination did not even rate a mention in one of his leaflets. Bizarre though it may seem for a revolutionary group, supposedly radical and adventurous in its thinking, the break up of Britain's two-party system, the ten year political fight inside the Scottish labour movement and even the latest 40% "sabotaging clause" built into the referendum did not merit a line.

The SWP had, however, made previous attempts to formulate an analysis of contemporary change in Scotland in a pamphlet *Nationalism or Socialism — the SNP and the SLP exposed*, written in 1977 by one of their Edinburgh teacher members, Allan Armstrong. In it he argued that the decisive factor behind the rise of the SNP had been North Sea oil, because this changed the previous hostility of certain Scottish capitalists towards the SNP and, in his phrase, they gained "effective class backing". The clear implication of the argument was that nationalism was some sort of "capitalist plot" designed to carve up the oil money. And he therefore concluded: "Any attempt by an independent Scotland to change the priorities of international capitalism by means of a Scottish Parliament would be a thousand times more futile than King Canute's attempt to hold back the sea . . . The Scottish Assembly and greater Scottish control over oil revenues merely represent a change between capitalists over the heads of the workers."³

This intransigence towards any elected Assembly was also shared by the *Workers Action* group, although they gave their argument an extra twist by explaining that they were firmly in favour of a referendum to allow a democratic decision, but just as firmly in favour of a no vote against an Assembly. Ironically this supposed deduction from Leninist orthodoxy — for "self-determination" but against "separation" — found immediate convergence with the views of Robin Cook, MP, in whose constituency many of them worked. But it remains to be seen whether the self-proclaimed Trotskyists of *Workers Action* will end up in alliance with left Labourites to defend the Union.

In the early 1970s the IMG was almost as hostile to any form of self-government. In a pamphlet published in 1972, *Scotland, Labour and Workers' Power* they argued in similar

terms regarding the class of the SNP (i.e. oil-hungry capitalists) and concluded with the slogan "The Assembly provides no solution — fight for a "Workers' Assembly". The exact nature of this strange "Workers' Assembly" remained vague, to say the least. The *Militant* current also confirmed the left's distaste for constitutional innovation north of the border, and in the years before the Wilson government consistently argued that the whole issue was irrelevant.

Some organisations were more sensitive to the changing political world around them, however, and by 1977 the IMG published *Socialists and the New Rise of Scottish Nationalism* which marked a firm change from its previous position. It argued that the essential nature of Scottish nationalism was middle-class radicalism, created by and given self-confidence by the social transformation of Scotland in the 1960s. It would therefore be naive and "ultra-left" for the revolutionary left to turn their backs on this demand for the extension of bourgeois democracy, the IMG argued, and they should actively fight for an elected Assembly for Scotland. In the same year the *Militant* current also re-thought their previous position. A long article by one of their leading members Pat Craven, appeared in their paper in February 1977, arguing that the Government's Devolution Bill had to be supported, and any limitations on the Assembly opposed, using arguments very similar to those of the IMG.

But none of this changes the fact that inside the far left groups, any appreciation of the growing autonomy of Scottish political life exists only among a minority. The attempt of the IMG to produce a journal, *Scottish Socialist*, which would relate the wider social, economic and cultural aspects of Scottish change to a socialist perspective, lasted only five issues. It was started by expelled members of the SLP in November 1976 and its last issue appeared in May/June 1977 just before the fusion of the remaining SLP expellees (called the "Scottish Socialist League") with the IMG. There have been no other attempts to relate to the increasing distinctiveness of politics in Scotland in a socialist way — no other journals, or political forums. The fate of publishing ventures from outside the far left in Scotland like the nationalist *Q* or *Seven Days* edited by Labour Party member, Brian Wilson, has only increased this conservatism among the revolutionaries.

This has left the revolutionaries passively watching the dramatic advance of the SNP among young people in central Scotland. Although studies of the social base of nationalist support are incomplete, it is generally agreed that the SNP has captured much of its solid support from young people, from whom the far left should be able to draw recruits. In England the Anti Nazi League (ANL) an anti-racist coalition spearheaded by the SWP, but with wide sections of the left participating, has been capable of reaching out to very large numbers of working-class youth, producing the largest far left demonstration for a decade with ANL Carnival in London in April 1978 attended by 80,000. So far, the left in Scotland has had no similar experiences in large-scale work among youth, and whether such political campaigning would involve approaches to SNP-influenced young people over questions like racism, democratic rights or even "international questions" like South Africa or Chile has not even been considered.

Outside the left-wing groups there were small but coherent forces who likewise expected a social crisis under Harold Wilson, but unlike the far left, actually expected it to take the form of nationalist turmoil. By far the most eccentric of these forces was the grandly named Scottish Workers Republican Party, formed in February 1974 with never more than a dozen members. It always favoured independence for Scotland, claiming to be part of the Home Rule tradition of socialism in Scotland stretching back to John MacLean, the Clydeside revolutionary of the First World War period. Like the IMG it decided to "enter" the SLP in 1976, but instead of being expelled, its political direction was to take it closer and yet closer to the leadership of Jim Sillars. Today the remnants of the SWRP, still inside the SLP, are famous mainly for their preference for the use of old Scots in their paper, *Scottish Worker*. Their rabid dislike of the "English" left and their couthie parochialism has made them into a caricature of the "small town democrat" so typical of the SNP in the 1950s, and they now produce a journal called *Crann-tara* which includes contributors from both the SLP and the SNP.

The other group which sought the mantle of John Maclean was the Maoist "Workers Party of Scotland", but their tiny size plus the confusion produced by the trial and conviction of their leading member Matt Lygate in 1972 has meant that an air of timelessness surrounds them and the journal *Scottish Van-*

guard where sturdy proletarians do battle with top-hatted capitalists. The publication, the party and its bookshop in Glasgow are unlikely to survive the retiral of Tom Murray, the aging and distinguished Stalinist who has led the organisation since its formation over ten years ago.

Back in the mainstream of the left, on the two decisive questions of political strategy — the hold of Labourism and the dynamic of the national movement — the left has had to lick its theoretical wounds. But the confusions and ambiguities seem to be only part of a much wider political problem: nowhere has the left managed to produce anything resembling an adequate theory or analysis of representative democracy, a form of political rule whose resilience has so confounded all their certainties of a few years ago. On other aspects of society the revolutionary left may yet prove to be more prescient. For example, their argument that Keynesian economics, (and the post-war boom they heralded) were only temporary palliatives for a fundamentally crisis-ridden economic structure, or their insistence on the "repressive nature" of the modern Atlantic state, many find vivid living proof in the not so distant future. This said, their inability to cope with the parliamentary democracy around them, is still an important, perhaps even decisive, failing.

Part of the problem is that groups on the left often construct a notion of what the class struggle *should* look like, rather than examining the actual course of political conflicts and events. For instance, the growing women's liberation movement and the questions of sexuality and social relations associated with it are often denounced as "petty bourgeois". Nuclear power, and the international campaign against its use, have been largely ignored, and the growth of novel and complex forms of political expression such as support for measures of self-government tend to be seen as a distraction. This often goes hand in hand with an almost infantile arrogance, which the SWP summed up — in one of its own bulletins — as "a growth of triumphalism and organisational sectarianism, a contempt among sections of the (SWP) cadre for the non-SWP left".⁴

One of the most interesting attempts to break out of this impasse has been the development of "Socialist Unity" in Britain as a whole. It is sponsored by the IMG, with the support of small grouplets hardly present north of the border such as the

"International Socialist Alliance" based on ex-members of the SWP, and the "Big Flame" group, a strongly syndicalist organisation from Liverpool. In the English Council elections this May, Socialist Unity stood 24 candidates as a test run for fielding candidates in the General Election. Most results were naturally pretty modest, but three of their candidates polled over 10% and one of them, an IMG teacher Hilda Kean, received 21% in Spitalfields in London. In most areas where they stood, they defeated both the National Front and the Communist Party on a political platform that explicitly stated that electoralism and parliamentarianism were reformist illusions.

It is indeed striking that the revolutionary left in Scotland has not managed to mount any similar forays into the electoral arena where a much broader and more popular style of work is required than is the norm for left groups.

Of course there have been some on the left anxious to go beyond the limitations of the groups, to take up what could loosely be called political "culture" to deal with the concerns of the working population from a socialist viewpoint, without the (as they see it) "theology" of the far left's search for Leninist orthodoxy. The brief life of the magazine *Calgacus* with its three issues from Winter 1975 to Spring 1976 was an interesting example of this mood. Its editorial board drew together four of the best known non Labour Party, but non groupuscule names in Scotland — Hamish Henderson, Director of the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University and later to join the SLP; John McGrath, playwright and founder of the 7.84 Theatre Group fresh from the huge success of their play "The Cheviot, Stag and Black, Black Oil"; Sorley Maclean, who remains Scotland's finest Gaelic poet, and Tom Nairn, an editor of *New Left Review* and a frequent and influential writer on the evolution and likely direction of the true Scottish "national soul". To this array of talent was added Harry McShane, contemporary of the great John Maclean and still keen despite his advancing years to add his support to any good revolutionary cause. Others on the board were a Welsh radical, Ned Thomas and an Irish Trotskyist, Brian Trench, with the entire venture edited by Ray Burnett living in the far outpost of Dornie in Ross-shire. Although, in the best traditions of impressive editorial boards, it never actually met, the composition of *Calgacus* demonstrated, as the *Red Papers* did a few years earlier, that among some

sections of the left, at least the will, if not the means, existed to examine the specifics of Scottish life.

Its very first editorial argued the need to "accept and assimilate the separate development of Scottish society into socialist activity". This had nothing to do with the nationalist ramblings of sects like the SWRP or the WPS. In aspiration at least, it directed its attention to the real world and the real labour movement living in it. "Of necessity", the first editorial continued, the "industrial shop floor remains the arena where such potential (for socialism) is best demonstrated. But it is not the only one. There is also that large amorphous area of life vaguely referred to as the "cultural".⁵

This important idea of fusing labour movement activity with wider cultural and social changes in society never really got off the ground. The first edition started with "Europe's forgotten minorities" dealing with Brittany, continued with five articles on Ireland, some material on Wales and a straight advertisement for the SNP by one of its prospective parliamentary candidates. Scotland was seen as part of some cultural chain of Celtic nations, and later issues developed this theme with exhaustive inquiries into the contribution to Scottish culture of the old Scots language. Translated to a country dominated by the Strathclyde conurbation with its very different traditions of popular culture and life, *Calgacus* became almost an object lesson in irrelevance. The alliance between the folk revivalists of the Edinburgh literati and the Celtic populists of Wester Ross proved to be politically and, more importantly, financially unstable, and Scotland's most adventurous socialist journal was swamped by bankruptcy.

This sensitivity of *Calgacus* to the question of "culture", no matter how ineffective the journal was in dealing with it, came from a remarkable shift in Edinburgh University in the early 1970s and in particular from the development of the Edinburgh University Student Publications Board. "Pubs Board" was the publisher of *The Red Paper*, but was and is truly catholic in its tastes. It was the strange combination of a Maoist student, Chic Maisels, and that previously noted expert on Scottish oral culture, Hamish Henderson, who attempted to insert one of European Marxism's most illustrious thinkers on precisely the subject of "culture" into the minds of the Scottish left. Under the editorship of Maisels *The New Edinburgh Review*

was transformed from a lethargic and pretentious student journal into a vehicle for translating and discussing the writings of Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist who died in one of Mussolini's prison and was (posthumously) author of the resulting "Prison Notebooks".⁶

Crudely put, the general theme of "Gramsci-ism" is that the bourgeoisie of the West rule by "consent" whereas the bourgeoisie of the East (including pre-1917 Russia) ruled essentially by "coercion". Therefore it follows that great attention must be paid to the nuances of culture and ideology which form the bonds tying the masses to capitalism, including of course nationalism, regionalism and other forms of "non working-class" ideas. Naturally, such a university-based project as Maisels and Henderson embarked on through NER could only be limited, and often the political editing and introductions left much to be desired. Even so, there must have been few who thought that these Gramscian plants produced around 1973 would find the Scottish left such a stony soil.

If the organised left groups were either lethargic about or even openly hostile to taking up the wide array of problems of everyday life — sexual, cultural, social — other forces were "spontaneously" to emerge which would. Above all, the women's movement in Scotland has emerged in the last two years, spanning issues as wide as finance and independence (for women, that is), equal pay and abortion. It is this latter issue above all which threatens to become a major issue in political life in Scotland, with the Catholic Church and the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) making themselves felt in their anti-abortion intervention into the Garscadden by-election. The revolutionary left were active in challenging them — the IMG working through the National Abortion Campaign, the SWP women through their journal *Women's Voice* — but it will be the women's liberation movement which will play a decisive part in deciding how that challenge is met. In the specifically Scottish context, a journal, *Scottish Women's Liberation Journal*, has now run to four issues, all of which have sold out. It is doubtful today if any new equivalent of *The Red Paper* were to be devised, that women's rights would be so easily ignored.

Other activist movements are growing thick and fast. The anti-nuclear movement has clearly only just started with its

successful rally against the proposed Torness nuclear power station. There is also the Conference of Socialist Economists, originally a small group of academics (organised on a UK basis) and now a rapidly growing forum for debate inside the revolutionary left.

These developments may be encouraging for the revolutionaries, but they are overshadowed by the failures and difficulties seen earlier. Although the Labour left and the "centrists" in between cannot take much comfort either, ten years after 1968 it is the revolutionaries who must feel the most frustrated by their lack of growth and development. Ironically all the signs are present that this stagnation is changing: there has been the recent numerical growth of the SWP to around 5,000 members nationally, the political successes of Socialist Unity, but above all, the dramatic scale of the Anti-Nazi League whose Carnival generated an excitement and *élan* not seen since precisely ten years ago, since the days of the campaign against US involvement in Vietnam. All the better reason perhaps to look soberly and calmly at some of the lessons of the last few years, before they are lost in yet another lurch forward into political space.

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